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# PLACES AND PARTICIPATION: COMPARING RESIDENT PARTICIPATION IN POST-WWII NEIGHBORHOODS IN NORTHWEST, CENTRAL AND SOUTHERN EUROPE

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**ABSTRACT:** *The participation of residents in improving their neighborhood, and especially variations in participation between places, has been the topic of research in various articles published in the last few years. What is still missing in these studies is an international comparative perspective, since national differences might be expected to account for at least part of the variation in participation. This article, therefore, includes an analysis of national differences. We assess how much relevance these national differences have in comparison with the influence of individual and neighborhood characteristics. Using multivariate modeling procedures, we address the following questions: To what extent can differences in participation be ascribed to neighborhood level variations (share of unemployed, share of ethnic minorities, share of owner-occupied housing, average experience of problems, share of residents active in a social organization)? And to what extent do national context variables (democratic history, empowerment policy) account for these differences? The findings suggest that both neighborhood and national context variables have explanatory power. The article provides an important starting point for a closer study of the role of national level factors.*

Social scientists have long been concerned with the negative consequences of civic disengagement for the democratic functioning of policymaking bodies. Americans are said to be “bowling alone” (Putnam, 2000) rather than becoming engaged in collective action. In Europe, too, there is much concern over the issue of the participation of residents in civil society. Here the concern is also a representation issue: that the active residents only represent part of the population. This issue is particularly prominent in those areas of the city where the population is strongly diversified in terms of both age and ethnicity.

Many studies have focused on the predictors of resident participation. Empirical research has made it clear that part of the variation in participation is related to individual characteristics such as socioeconomic and demographic variables. In addition, social capital theory tends to focus on the effects of social networks and shared norms on civic action. Verba and Nie had already shown in 1972 how taking part in communal activities played an important part in motivating,

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preparing, and steering political participation. Comparative studies suggest that not only individual characteristics, but also neighborhood differences account for part of the variation.

It is feasible that not only individual and neighborhood characteristics, but also national differences, may explain the participation of residents. As previous comparative studies have shown (Uslaner & Badescu, 2003), it is the national political culture that defines the national variants of citizenship: to what extent are residents given a role in the democratic process? Historic developments, such as the change from a centralistic, socialist government to a more democratic government might be influential.

This article draws together these separate bodies of knowledge to facilitate a broader understanding of the factors influencing participation. In particular, attention is paid to the characteristics of places as potential determinants of participation. The main question can be formulated as follows: how can neighborhood participation be explained by individual, neighborhood, and national characteristics? While we know from other studies that individual and neighborhood characteristics matter, our specific aim is to describe how the effects of these sets of characteristics change when the national level is taken into account. If it should turn out to be unimportant, serious questions might be asked about the usefulness of national policies that stimulate participation.

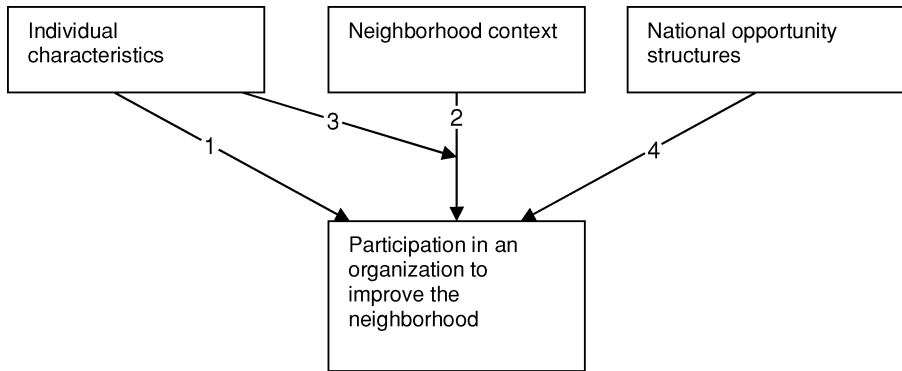
In line with what Pickvance (2001) calls a differentiating comparative analysis with plural causation, we focus on the differences between contexts (neighborhoods, cities) rather than on the similarities. We concentrate on the impact of individual and household characteristics, neighborhood level variations (share of unemployed, share of ethnic minorities, share of owner-occupied housing, average experience of problems, share of people active in social organizations) and national context variables (democratic history, empowerment policy). The strategy contrasts with existing approaches to participation, which generally focus on individuals within the context of their neighborhood, and thus neglect the multiple ways in which individual decision-making is influenced by and embedded in the national context.

The article starts with an outline of the conceptual framework that guided the research. Next, the case study is described, starting with the research design, and followed by the results of the analyses. The article concludes with a discussion of the possible implications this work has for future studies of neighborhood participation.

## **PARTICIPATION IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD: COMPETING EXPLANATIONS**

This article concentrates on participation in organizations in urban neighborhoods. Participation is seen in this article as a *voluntary* act, which can itself be seen as the guiding principle of a civil society. As we study it here, the participation of individuals takes place in *associations* where they are the dominant collective actors. Other research has also focused on participation in associations. First, associations are sometimes believed to protect the citizen of a too-powerful state, as radical democrats like Jürgen Habermas, Ulrich Preuss, and Ulrich Beck have noted. In their eyes, associations can help develop the means of collective opinion and action. Particularly when they are representative of the different opinions within the community, associations can foster pluralist and diverse contexts that may allow better management of conflicts (Warren, 2001). Second, associative democrats like Paul Hirst, Joshua Cohen, and Joel Rogers see associations as a means of putting less pressure on the state and revitalizing locally based decision making on concrete issues. We focus on the *neighborhood* level as the spatial level at which the organizations are active.

Several kinds of explanation for participation in the neighborhood have been put forward in the literature. Explanations feature different levels of analysis: the individual level, the level of the neighborhood, and the level of the national context. In Figure 1, we indicate that individual



**FIGURE 1**

### Conceptual Framework

characteristics influence the propensity to participate directly (arrow 1). Neighborhood characteristics also influence the propensity of an individual to participate (arrow 2), although some of the individual characteristics influence this relationship (interaction effect, arrow 3). Finally, national opportunity structures also influence participation (arrow 4). Below we illustrate in more detail how each of the arrows influences participation.

### Individual Level Explanations

At the individual level, theorists have devoted attention to individual resources such as income and education on participation (Staeheli & Clarke, 2003; Verba & Nie, 1972). The general idea is that the more resources one has, the more likely one is to become active in (political) activities. This relationship holds, because these resources generate better skills, larger networks, and easier access to institutions. Next to that, demographic characteristics like age, gender, and household composition are important for the explanation of participatory behavior (Campbell & Lee, 1992; Fischer, 1982; Gerson, Stueve, & Fischer, 1977; Guest & Wierzbicki, 1999). In addition, residential status (home ownership, length of residence) can affect residents' perceptions of their community and their place in it (Gerson et al., 1977). According to these theories, the amount of time one has to spend and the stake one has in the neighborhood are of basic importance in neighborhood participation: the more time that is available and the greater the importance of life within the neighborhood, the greater the chances of participating. The value of their home is important to homeowners; they have invested substantially in their dwelling and they usually want to keep the neighborhood a safe and clean place to ensure that their home at least keeps its value.

Ethnicity is also an important explanatory variable for participation, because psychological attitudes—like trust, but also values and norms—are shaped through the position one has in society (Verba & Nie, 1972; Marschall, 2001). In the United States it was found that ethnic minorities participate more in order to compensate for their lower socioeconomic status. In other words, they aimed to attain through (political) participation what they could not otherwise acquire because of a lack of personal resources in terms of income or education. In this case, trust in the general political system is high. But contrasting views are also found; these assert that trust between groups is low (ethnic groups trust only their own kind) and consequently participation is low (Uslaner & Badescu, 2003). Clearly, there is a strong relationship between ethnicity, trust, and participation, but it is not quite clear which direction this takes.

### Explanations on the Level of the Neighborhood

The second approach to the explanation of residents' participation concentrates on the neighborhood level.<sup>1</sup> Studies in this tradition examine the effects of the social context of the neighborhood and the extent to which individuals are connected socially to others within it (Marschall, 2001). An important basic finding is that people associate more easily with others who have a similar income, education, ethnicity, and lifestyle (Gerson et al., 1977). If people can readily identify with a group in the neighborhood, their capacity to participate in that group will be enhanced. This statement forms an important starting point for our analysis, because it means that an individual living in a neighborhood with many other people with the same characteristics will participate more than the same individual would when in a neighborhood with fewer peers. So a person from an ethnic minority will participate more when living in a neighborhood with a high share of people from the same ethnic group. Having a considerable share of the same ethnic group in a neighborhood is then considered an asset for participation for an individual belonging to that ethnic group. One of the explanations for this phenomenon can be that ethnic communities develop a kind of consciousness because of the pressures from outside, which make them feel more cohesive (Olsen, 1972) or even force them to search for support from their peers.

The same kind of reasoning may hold for the unemployed or poorly educated or those with low incomes. In neighborhoods with concentrations of disadvantaged residents—such as some of the large housing estates studied here—residents may feel very cohesive, and consequently participate more to improve their situation (Gerson et al., 1977; Peleman, 2002). The converse may also be found, because these groups feel abandoned, by local politicians for example, and consequently are unwilling to become involved in neighborhood management. Or, as Ross and colleagues put it: “Persons feeling abandoned on an island of disadvantage may believe it safest to suspect everyone and trust no one” (2001, pp. 572–573). In this case, a disadvantaged person living in a disadvantaged neighborhood can be expected to participate less than this same person would when living in a more prosperous neighborhood. It has been found that more advantaged places have higher levels of informal social ties that bind neighbors together (Sampson & Groves, 1989), which may generate a positive effect on participation.

In the United States, the Moving to Opportunity (MTO) experiment indicates that poor households who move from a highly impoverished public housing neighborhood to nondeprived areas gain in their feelings of safety and neighborhood quality and experience no loss in social ties (Feins & Shroder, 2005). However, the absence of data on the long-term effects on the life paths of these people makes it difficult to conclude that moving to a nondeprived area also has positive long-term effects (Varady & Walker, 2003). The direction of the impact of the social networks clearly correlates with the degree of advantage in a socioeconomic sense, but again it remains unclear which direction this relationship takes.

Other social researchers have focused on the role of social organizations in political participation. De Tocqueville (1967 [1835]) had already indicated in the first half of the 19th century that social organizations function as “schools of democracy” where people learn to work together, trust and respect one another, and come to terms with the basic principles of democracy. Almond and Verba (1989 [1963]) continued this line of thought and concluded that individuals who are active in a social organization are also politically active. Putnam's ideas (1993, 2000) on social capital can be placed in this tradition. The underlying theoretical idea is that the more individuals interact with others in organizations and institutions, the more they are exposed to social norms of political behavior and opportunities to participate.

Social organizations can have both a mobilizing and an intermediary role (Olsen, 1972; Warren, 2001). The intermediary role refers to the activities of organizations in influencing policymaking processes. This role is the more important here: the mobilizing role refers to the function of

these social organizations as “schools of democracy” in which the residents acquire all kinds of competences and capacities. The degree to which individuals have the opportunity to participate in social organizations in the neighborhood—because there is a high density of attractive organizations for them to become part of—will thus have a positive impact on their participation in the neighborhood as well.

Finally, the characteristics of the local environment are thought to be capable of influencing participation in the neighborhood. Problems, although experienced at the individual level, are actually present at the neighborhood level. Residents’ willingness to do something about local problems will probably depend on the other characteristics of the neighborhood in relation to the individual characteristics of the residents. If people can associate with neighbors like themselves (from their own group), they will trust each other and form civic organizations that can contend with the threats that confront them (Uslaner & Badescu, 2003). On the other hand, if one cannot associate with others in the neighborhood, combating local problems becomes extremely difficult.

All in all, it seems that an individual’s opportunities to identify with others in the neighborhood are very important in determining the likelihood of participating in neighborhood management: and then only if there are existing social structures of which one can become part.

### National Opportunity Structures as an Explanation

As Pickvance (2001) argues, most societies change relatively slowly, and their features are important conditions that help explain the topic of interest, in this case participation in the neighborhood. International comparative research involves the study of societies that are scattered over space and are chosen because they represent different values of variables that are controlled or structural for a given society (p. 14). The countries in this research are scattered over Europe. Former state-socialist societies are included as well as societies with a longer democratic history.

Earlier research has shown how people’s involvement in voluntary and associational activities in different countries differs in degree and kind. We summarize the explanations for international differentiation under two broad headings: democratic history and empowerment policy. One explanation focuses on historically shaped attitudes that may be hard to change, while the second points to the opportunity structures that promote civic engagement.

First, the interpretation that emphasizes the effects of a *democratic history* follows from the proposition that associational activity takes time to develop. Empirical evidence shows how the number of years of continuous democracy influences associational involvement. In an internationally comparative study, the United States and Canada have high scores on voluntary association membership, as do the Netherlands, Sweden, and Norway, that may be attributable to their long history of democracy and political organization (Curtis et al., 2001).<sup>2</sup> As Lipset (1994) notes, the democratic notions of freedom of speech and the right of assembly are not developed instantaneously, but take a long time to take root in people’s hearts. In countries with a longer democratic history (such as the United Kingdom, Sweden, and the Netherlands), residents may be more used to participation, while in countries without such a history (such as the former socialist countries) embarking on participation would be considered much more difficult. People living in established and stable democracies will tend to be more active in forming and joining voluntary organizations of different types. The reason for their interest may be that they have had more experience with the principles and practices of democratic activity (Lipset, 1994).

In Central and Eastern Europe, the transition from a communist to a democratic regime has not meant that large numbers of people have joined voluntary organizations. As Uslaner and Badescu have said: “the state repression ended, but the culture left by more than half a century of authoritarian government endured. People had been socialized not to trust their neighbors. They had few opportunities to participate in civic life. The only forms of participation permitted

tended to be activities that reinforced, rather than challenged the regime. People could join the Communist Party or unions, but civic engagement that was divorced from political authority or that could in any way threaten governmental authority was generally prohibited" (Uslaner & Badescu, 2003). The authors even go so far as to assert that the levels of civic engagement and trust are both far lower in communist countries than in the West. Similarly, Inglehart and Baker (2000) show that interpersonal trust is positively related to the stability of democracy in society. Both research studies show how people in former communist countries are reluctant to trust each other and to take an active part in their neighborhood. We could therefore expect that participation would be higher in countries with a long and sustained period of democracy.

The second explanation is *empowerment policy*. Empowerment has been defined as the set of mechanisms through which people gain greater control over their lives, thereby raising a critical awareness of their sociopolitical environment that may result in participation (Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995). Local and national governments can provide the mechanisms through which people are empowered (given the capacity) to do something, for example, to take part in neighborhood associations.

Empowerment is influenced by complex interactions between individual characteristics and the contextual features of community processes and settings (Robertson & Minkler, 1994; Zimmerman, 1990). Earlier findings have shown that voluntary activity and association are rooted in institutional contexts; associational activity is extensive in decentralized states with a high degree of responsibility for associations. Schofer and Fourcade-Gourinchas (2001), for example, compare associational activity in various countries. Based on Jepperson's work (2002),<sup>3</sup> they show that *statism* and *corporateness* are important explanatory variables for associational activity. *Statism* refers to the degree of decentralization of power in a country. Associational activity is lower in countries with a centralized and autonomous state apparatus than in countries with an active and organized society where political power is decentralized. *Corporateness* identifies the degree to which social actors are politically incorporated. In corporate countries, collective organization is promoted and actively supported by the state, and participation in associations is of a high level. They are often large, nationwide, and democratically run. The associations often have many responsibilities and are involved in policymaking institutions.

From the above it follows that we could expect the participation of residents in their neighborhood to be helped by "top-down" policies that focus on "bottom-up" mobilization (Body-Gendrot & Martiniello, 2002). It is the national political culture that defines the framework of legitimacy within which political claims are made and participation options offered. In the Netherlands, for example, the involvement of the residents in neighborhood development plans is a prerequisite for obtaining funding from the national government. The idea underlying this requirement is that neighborhood improvement needs to be supported by those it concerns (= legitimacy), because the effectiveness of the policies are then enhanced.

There are numerous studies, especially in Northwest and Southern Europe, describing how people can best be empowered (see, for example, Fitzpatrick, Hastings, and Kintrea, 2000; Docherty, Goodlad, & Paddison, 2001; Peterson, Lowe, Aquilino, & Schneider, 2005) or associations stimulated (Warren, 2001). One of the important actions a government can undertake is to provide funding for the financial support of community or neighborhood workers and to enable activities and participation processes to take place. Another action is to ensure that training is provided for those who are or want to be active in their neighborhood. Government regulation can also influence civic engagement, although too many rules and regulations can discourage involvement in public policymaking (Berry, 2005). And finally, building networks that bring people together and bridge the differences between groups is important. We could expect participation to be higher in the countries where there is a (national) policy that actively empowers people.

The arguments above lead to the following research questions: First, how does participation in neighborhood organizations differ over the regions of Europe? Second, to what extent are neighborhood-context variables capable of explaining differences in individual participation in neighborhood organization? Third, to what extent are national-opportunity structures helpful in explaining differences in individual participation in neighborhood organizations?

## **POST-WWII NEIGHBORHOODS IN EUROPE: A BRIEF CHARACTERISTIC**

In many European countries, the parts of cities that evolved in the first three or four decades after the Second World War were built as large estates and show strong similarities (see Murie, Knorr-Siedow, & Van Kempen, 2003; Musterd & Van Kempen, 2005; Turkington, Van Kempen, & Wassenberg, 2004): they tend to contain apartment blocks in middle- and high-rise structures often, but not always, intermingled with single-family dwellings. A generation of prewar modernists (such as Le Corbusier) was able to put its stamp on the new estates. The result was large apartment blocks, with large open green spaces between the blocks, and a separation of functions. Carefully designed urban landscapes emerged. Positive opinions and evaluations about the large housing estates were very common in the early days of their existence (Dekker & Van Kempen, 2005).

The ownership structure of the housing units differs in the various countries. In Southern and Eastern Europe, owner-occupation is the most prevalent form, but that is a more recent development in the East, because former social-rented dwellings were sold to their occupants after the fall of the communist governments (see Murie et al., 2005). In the case of Northern Europe local government authorities own the majority of the dwellings, renting them out to low-income families. In Western Europe most dwellings on the estates are in the social or public-rented sector. In general, dwellings in this part of Europe are affordable for low-income households.

In many cases the estates were built for family households. As it is already 30–40 years since this happened, the original population is now ageing, leading to an overrepresentation of the elderly among the current residents. This overrepresentation applies especially to Southern Europe. But in East European estates, it is the age cohort between 45 years and 54 years that is overrepresented. These estates are able to attract well-educated families. The influx of ethnic minorities is more typical of estates in Northern and Western Europe than those in the Southern and Eastern parts of Europe. In Western Europe there are now estates in which over 80% of the residents belong to a minority ethnic group (Dekker & Van Kempen, 2005).

Currently, many of the large housing estates in European cities are no longer popular. The estates developed into areas that were problematic in many respects. Dekker and Van Kempen (2005) listed the following problems (for example, see Cars, 2000; Evans, 1998; Hall, 1997; Musterd, Priemus, & Van Kempen, 1999; Power, 1997; Skifter Andersen, 2003; Social Exclusion Unit, 1998; Taylor, 1998; Wacquant, 1996): many dwellings with clear signs of physical decay; relatively cheap dwellings resulting in concentrations of households who cannot afford to live elsewhere; high unemployment rates; many unsafe spots in the areas; traffic jams and parking problems; shopping centers closed down because of declining demand; vacancies in the housing stock because of lack of demand; drug abuse; lack of meeting places for youngsters; stigmatization of the estate by outsiders; stigmatization as a result of high shares of ethnic minorities.

The separation of functions and large green public areas between the housing blocks that are so typical of these areas are now seen as a problem as much as an asset. The positive side is that there is often a lot of space for recreational purposes, parking facilities, and lack of disturbance by public functions. Unfortunately, these assets also have their problems; the green areas and public spaces are often poorly maintained, especially on estates in Central and Eastern Europe, but also on some in Western Europe. Consequently, sometimes these spaces cannot be used or



are vandalized. Areas where cars are not allowed minimize the possibilities of police patrol, and may readily attract all kinds of criminal behavior such as drug dealing and abuse.

Safety is now one of the major problems on many estates. Because they function at the bottom of the housing market they attract poor people and on some estates vacancy rates are high. These two developments can lead to a lack of budgetary resources for maintenance, antisocial behavior, vandalism, and feelings of insecurity (Dekker & Van Kempen, 2005). Spirals of decline can soon set in when an estate becomes unsafe (Prak & Priemus, 1985). In some cases, as Manzi and Smith-Bowers (2005) show, the more prosperous live in gated communities within poor neighborhoods, because of actual crime levels and the fear of crime. In other cases, as Skogan (1988) has argued, disorder “undermines the stability of the housing market . . . undercuts residential satisfaction, leads people to fear for the safety of their children, and encourages area residents to move away” (p. 65).

## DATA COLLECTION AND METHODS

The research reported in this article is based on the results of a survey carried out in the 29 post-WWII housing estates that were part of the RESTATE project (Restructuring Large-scale Housing Estates in European Cities). Research was undertaken on large housing estates in 16 cities in 10 countries: France (Lyon), Germany (Berlin), Hungary (Budapest and Nyiregyháza), Italy (Milan), the Netherlands (Amsterdam and Utrecht), Poland (Warsaw), Slovenia (Ljubljana and Koper), Spain (Barcelona and Madrid), Sweden (Jönköping and Stockholm), and the United Kingdom (Birmingham and London). For the present article we decided not to include the two neighborhoods in Berlin (Germany), because of the highly specific national situation. (One of the Berlin estates is in former West Berlin; the other is in former East Berlin; the East German culture has rapidly been replaced by the more dominant West German culture.) We were left with 27 estates in nine countries for the analysis.

The same survey design was used for all the estates, which—within certain margins—makes it possible to draw comparisons between the estates, the cities, and the countries. Of course, we need to be careful with such an international questionnaire. There may be differences in the interpretation of some of the questions. We compared the outcomes of the survey with other information, and in the case of doubt concerning any question we excluded it from the analysis. We did not include the responses to the question on income for this reason. The data that we have used here fulfill the criteria of validity (Hart et al., 2005).

Among many other topics, the survey included questions on participation. Previous reports were based on this survey; they put the estates in one country (or sometimes even in one city) to the fore (see Aalbers et al., 2005; Andersson et al., 2005; Belmessous et al., 2005; Černič Mali et al., 2005; Hall, Murie, Rowlands, & Sankey, 2005; Knorr-Siedow & Droste, 2005; Pareja Eastaway et al., 2005; Tosics, Geröházi, & Szemző, 2005; Van Beekhoven & Van Kempen, 2005; Węclawowicz et al., 2005; Zajczyk, Mugnano, & Palvarini, 2005). For an in-depth analysis we refer the reader to these reports. A report by Musterd and Van Kempen (2005) shows results per estate in a comparative perspective.

The survey was carried out between February and June 2004. In each case, a random sample was drawn, usually from the whole estate. For some estates, address lists were used as the basis for the sample; in other cases, the researchers first had to take a complete inventory of addresses for themselves. Teams were hired to carry out the survey. They worked under the supervision of the RESTATE partners. Briefings were organized to instruct the survey teams. In some cases (as, for example, in Amsterdam and Utrecht) interviewers were recruited with a specific ethnic background in order to raise the response rate among, for example, the Turkish and Moroccan residents on the estates. In other cases, family members translated questions during a face-to-face

interview. The questionnaire could be completed by the respondents themselves, but also by the interviewers in a face-to-face interview. The response rate differed per estate, but tended to be around 40%. In general, older and indigenous people were overrepresented in the survey, while younger people and nonnatives were underrepresented. For the young people, this discrepancy probably relates to their having more activities outside the home. The underrepresentation of the nonnative population is presumably related to language and cultural differences. The nonresponse is the result of the usual problems with questionnaires: people not at home, not interested, or they think that taking part in the questionnaire will not improve their situation. However, all the authors of the country reports stressed that, despite the over- and under-representations, the survey results reflected the local situations well (for more detailed information on the (non) response, see Musterd & Van Kempen, 2005).

Furthermore, we have analyzed the national opportunity structure on the basis of a comparative study of the policies with regard to large-scale housing estates in the RESTATE research neighborhoods mentioned above. In one report per country, the following questions were answered: What is the philosophy behind the different existing policies with regard to the large-scale housing estates? What are the main aims? What are the main activities included in the policies and what is the balance between these activities? How are the policies organized? Who participates in the policy and who has decided about this participation? Can the policy be seen as a top-down or as a bottom-up process? (See Aalbers et al., 2004; Belmessous et al., 2004; Hall, Murie, Rowlands, & Sankey, 2004; Öresjö et al., 2004; Pareja Eastaway, Tapada Berteli, Van Boxmeer, & Garcia Ferrando, 2004; Ploštajner, Černič Mali, & Sendi, 2004; Szemző & Tosics, 2004; Węclawowicz, Guszcz, & Kozłowski, 2004; Zajczyk et al., 2004). For an in-depth analysis, we refer the reader to these reports.

To answer these questions, reports and memorandums were analyzed. They were written by the state, municipal organizations, and evaluation teams. In addition, a number of stakeholders in the neighborhoods were interviewed, at the municipal level and at the level of the central government, ranging from ministers, mayors, and policy coordinators at the city level, to representatives of companies, and people working in the respective neighborhoods. Virtual meetings (discussions on the internet) were also held with several groups of international urban representatives in the RESTATE project.

Here, we distinguish two aspects of the national opportunity structure on the basis of these reports. The first aspect is the degree to which there is an active empowerment policy from above—that is, from the national or local government: is any action taken to amplify the voice that comes from below (the residents)? Empowerment can be seen as the action taken by the national or local government to set up training to encourage people to participate in their neighborhood's affairs. Of course, it would be even better if the residents were actually listened to by the policy-makers, but the impact of residents on policymaking processes is difficult to assess with the data available.

Action to empower residents has without doubt been taken by national governments in North-west European countries (United Kingdom, Sweden, the Netherlands, and France). In most of these countries, national policies seek to empower people, but whether they succeed is an empirical question that we cannot answer fully on the basis of the reports mentioned (Aalbers et al., 2004; Belmessous et al., 2004; Hall et al., 2004; Öresjö et al., 2004). These show that the policy actions are not always appropriate or faultless, but they at least provide evidence of efforts made by a local or national government to empower its citizens.

In South European countries, experiences are mixed. For Spain, the situation is far from clear. Here, social movements have been important carriers for claiming political liberty and for increasing the quality of urban life at local level, especially in Madrid. These social movements still have an important presence in many districts and neighborhoods. In some of these, participation

has been actively stimulated and is part of the Community Development Plan (Pareja Eastaway et al., 2004). In Spain, groups within neighborhoods are now actively empowered. Spain can therefore also be considered a country with an active empowerment strategy, although its origins are different from those in Northwest European countries.

In Italy, there has been a decrease in citizens' participation through formal and traditional institutions at the local level over the last decade. Participation now takes place much more along the lines of activism and bottom-up neighborhood initiatives. Individuals and small groups take the initiative and that sometimes grows to wider actions. Support from local government, let alone central government, is rare (Zajczyk et al., 2004). Italy, like Slovenia (see below), is not considered here to have an active empowerment policy.

In Slovenia, several forms of residents' participation can be distinguished, such as people's initiatives, assemblies (obligatory and consultative), referenda, consumer protection councils, public presentations, public exhibitions, and public discussions. The local government is very active in empowering the local population. Slovenia could, therefore, be considered to have an active empowerment policy. It must, however, be said that, despite all these initiatives at the local level to promote participation, the national institutions still largely decide policy design and implementation (Ploštajner et al., 2004). We could expect the levels of participation in Slovenia to be higher than in other Central European countries because of this empowerment policy.

Finally, in Poland and Hungary—the other two Central European countries—participation is limited, for example to just two or three meetings a year of the cooperatives with their managers (Węclawowicz et al., 2004; Szemző et al., 2004). These two former communist countries clearly do not have active empowerment policies.

The second aspect of the national opportunity structure that we distinguish is the history of inclusive citizenship: that is to say, does the country have a democratic history? This is not the same as positive empowerment policies, but refers to the experience of the people with the principles and practices of democratic activity. As we have indicated above, the level of civic engagement was far lower in communist countries than in the West (Uslaner & Badescu, 2003). People in a state with a more authoritarian past feel that it would be dangerous to place confidence in those who are not familiar to them (people living on the other side of the street or in another street in the same neighborhood, for example), because they could be agents of the state and placing confidence in them could lead to betrayal. In democratic societies the stakes are smaller and strangers do not usually get one into trouble. People living in former communist countries used to live their lives in small social networks made up of people they knew well (Flap & Völker, 2003; Völker, 1995). Even after the change to a democratic system, people are still reluctant to trust others and to take an active part in the neighborhood (Uslaner & Badescu, 2003).

On the basis of the democratic history we divided the countries in this research project into two groups: those with a previous communist system (Slovenia, Hungary, and Poland) and those with a longer democratic history (Sweden, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, France, Spain, and Italy).

### Measuring Participation

Participation—the dependent variable—is based on a question in the survey: “Do you or one of the members in your household participate actively in an association that aims to improve the neighborhood?” The people who answered “yes” form one category (participation = 1) and those who answered “no” form the other category.

## Independent Variables

The independent variables at the individual level include sociodemographic status. First, a continuous variable for the respondent's age (in years) and then a dichotomous variable for household composition (with or without children) were recorded. Ethnicity is also included in the analyses as a dichotomous variable (those of native origin, and ethnic minority groups) (natives = reference category (0)). Nonnatives include people from many different origins. The largest groups are of Moroccan, Tunisian, Algerian, Surinam, Bosnian or Serbian origin. This variable is the result of self-categorization (in terms of ethnicity, what would you call yourself?). Because numbers were small, we were unable to distinguish between the groups in our analysis and had to put them all together.

Two indicators of socioeconomic status are discerned: education, and having a paid job. First, education is included in the analyses as a trichotomous variable based on the number of years of school education the respondent had followed from the age of six. A low level of education means between 0 and 6 years of education and is comparable to primary education in most countries. A medium level signifies between 6 and 10 years of education and is comparable to secondary education in most countries. A high level of education is 11 years or more and is comparable to tertiary education such as university or college (higher education is the reference category = 0). Second, a dichotomous variable represents the employment situation of an individual (those with a paid job, and those without a paid job = 0).

The housing situation is first reflected in a dichotomous variable (moved into the neighborhood before 2001 (= 0) or moved into the neighborhood => 2001). Another dichotomous variable measures home-ownership (homeowners including condominiums (= 0), and tenants). Many of the variables above correspond with those used in other research on participation (Kang & Kwak, 2003; Marschall, 2001).

To measure the impact of the neighborhood context, we included ratio variables on the share of unemployed, the share of ethnic minorities, and the share of owner-occupied housing. These figures are based on local data available from the authorities. Of course, some caution is needed here, because different authorities may use different definitions. We are confident, however, that there are no systematic faults here, and that the differences between the countries balance each other out. We have also included an index of the problems experienced in the neighborhood as reported by the respondents themselves. This index is the result of a list of 16 items, which refer to serious problems that have been experienced personally in the neighborhood (Cronbach's alpha is 0.8144, so they do indeed measure the same kinds of issue). This list was made relative by dividing the number of problems experienced by the total number of problems (count/16). We have taken the square function of the original variable to control for outliers. The problems are: rubbish on the streets; drug abuse; burglary in dwellings; burglary in cars; graffiti/vandalism; feelings of unsafety; upkeep of public spaces; condition of the roads; playgrounds for children; maintenance of the buildings; lack of employment; quality of the schools; quality of the commercial services; quality of public services; different values/norms/lifestyles; racism/racist harassment. We have used the last indicator to measure the neighborhood context's impact: it is the share of respondents in the neighborhood that is active in a sports club, cultural association or another organized social activity in the neighborhood (0 = nonactive).

The national opportunity structure is measured by two dichotomous variables: first, whether there is an active empowerment policy or not (0 = no). The countries were coded according to the findings in the 'Policies and Practices' RESTATE reports described above. Second, a dichotomous variable represents the inclusive citizenship history: whether a country has had a democratic system for at least 30 years or not (previous communist system = 0). Slovenia, Hungary, and Poland are regarded as having a previous communist system. Table 1 gives an

TABLE 1

National Opportunity Structures Per Country

Country	Empowerment Policy	Democratic History
Spain	Yes, empowerment policy	Democratic system
Italy	No empowerment policy	Democratic system
Slovenia	Yes, empowerment policy	Previous communist system
Hungary	No empowerment policy	Previous communist system
Poland	No empowerment policy	Previous communist system
Sweden	Yes, empowerment policy	Democratic system
The Netherlands	Yes, empowerment policy	Democratic system
The United Kingdom	Yes, empowerment policy	Democratic system
France	Yes, empowerment policy	Democratic system

Source. RESTATE reports 'Policies and Practices' (2004).

overview of the national opportunity structures per country. We are, of course, aware that working with dichotomous variables is somewhat unsophisticated, but with the relatively small number of countries we could not afford to make more detailed constructions.

Analytical Strategy

To answer the research questions, bivariate analyses were first used to analyze how participation in neighborhood organizations differs over the regions of Europe. We have used cross-tabulations with Chi<sup>2</sup> to analyze whether there is any impact of individual or household variables when they are measured on a nominal or ordinal scale. For the ratio variable of age, we performed a *t*-test for independent samples. We then investigated to what extent neighborhood-context variables are helpful in explaining differences in individual participation (research question 2). Since these independent variables are measured on a ratio-interval scale, we used the *t*-test for independent samples.

In the introduction to this paper, we asserted that the influence of the national context on participation in urban neighborhoods is an underresearched topic. The main aim of the research reported in this article has therefore been to find out whether the national context does have an effect. To reach this aim, we carried out a logistic regression. The dependent variable for the multivariate models below is binary and indicates whether respondents do (= 1) or do not participate (= 0). The models are designed to isolate the effect of each of a set of ordinal or rational independent variables on this dichotomous dependent variable (Schutjens et al., 2002). By applying the models here we were able to determine whether, for instance, the neighborhood context would still be significant when they were analyzed jointly with individual variables (model 2). It goes without saying that the main aim of the analysis was to find out whether the national context matters when variables on the individual (or household) level and on the neighborhood level were analyzed jointly (model 3).

RESULTS

The Importance of Individual Characteristics

As stated in the theoretical section of this article, several researchers have found that personal and household characteristics correlate positively with participation. In general terms, previous results can be summarized as follows: the more resources and the more time one has available, the

**TABLE 2a****Characteristics of the Residents Related to Participation in Neighborhood Organizations, Per European Region (Percentages Per Category)**

Characteristics		NW Europe Does Participate %	CE Europe Does Participate %	S Europe Does Participate %
Household composition	With children	8.9	6.0	17.3
	Without children	7.3	4.5	14.2
Ethnicity (NW <sup>***</sup> )	Natives	10.5	5.3	16.3
	Nonnatives	7.0	4.8	10.0
Years of education (NW <sup>*</sup> )	0 years	11.8	0	22.2
	1–6 years	15.2	0	15.5
	6–10 years	7.1	4.8	15.9
	11–12 years	7.5	3.6	8.9
	13–14 years	8.9	6.4	12.0
	15 years or more	8.8	6.8	16.5
Professional status	Paid work	7.9	4.4	16.0
	No paid work	8.2	6.2	15.4
	Other	12.7	3.4	12.5
Time lived in the neighborhood (NW <sup>***</sup> )	<2001	9.3	6.1	16.5
	≥ 2001	5.3	0.5	10.8
Tenure (NW and S <sup>***</sup> )	Tenant	7.2	5.9	4.8
	Home-owner <sup>a</sup>	14.4	4.9	18.9
Total % active to improve the neighborhood <sup>***</sup>		8.1	5.3	15.6
Total N (= 100% abs.)		2186	1160	825

Notes. <sup>a</sup>including condominiums in CE Europe.

Statistically significant difference: \* =  $p < 0.1$ ; \*\* =  $p < 0.5$ ; \*\*\* =  $p < 0.01$ .

Source. RESTATE survey 2004.

**TABLE 2b****Characteristics of the Residents Related to Participation in Neighborhood Organizations (*t*-test)**

Characteristic	Participation	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Age <sup>***</sup> (all regions)	No	3668	46.76	17.39
	Yes	359	51.73	16.40

Statistically significant difference: \*\*\* =  $p < 0.01$ .

Source. RESTATE survey 2004.

greater is one's interest in participation. The research reported here more or less confirms these general ideas (see Table 2). However, the overall goal of this research was to find differences between countries and assess the impact of the neighborhood. Tables 2a and 2b therefore show the differences between the three parts of Europe (Northwest, South, and Central).

The descriptive analyses show that there are relatively more active residents in Southern Europe than in Northwest or Central Europe. In the sections below we present analyses that show to what extent the neighborhood and national context influence the levels of participation in these three regions. In this section, we describe how participation is related to individual- and household characteristics. In all three parts of Europe, age makes a difference, and is therefore not presented per region (Table 2b). Further analyses (not shown) indicate that the respondents who tend to participate most are aged around 25 years or 40 years or over 65 years.

There are some differences between the regions in terms of who participates most. In Central Europe, participation rates are low for all residents, irrespective of their socioeconomic status, ethnicity, demographic variables, or home characteristics. In Southern Europe the active residents often own the home in which they live. In Northwest Europe, individual variables matter more than in the other two regions. Here, those who tend to participate more are the natives, the less well educated, those who have lived in the neighborhood for a long time, owner-occupiers, and the elderly. Correspondingly, participation rates are lower for ethnic minorities, the highly educated, those who have recently moved into the neighborhood and/or rent their homes, and the very young.

The findings indicate that, in Northwest Europe, the associations that aim to improve the neighborhood are currently justifiably being called into question as representative bodies. Many of the neighborhoods in this part of Europe function at the bottom of the housing market and are characterized by high shares of immigrants and renters in the social sector. The findings suggest that these groups are not well represented in current associational activity within the neighborhood.

Our findings for Northwest Europe are in line with other recent research on participation (Dekker, 2007; Lelieveldt, 2004; Marschall, 2001). However, the low number of significant results for Central Europe does indicate that the general literature on participation and the research on correlations between individual variables and participation are not necessarily valid for countries with a postsocialist history.

### The Importance of Neighborhood Characteristics

Table 3 gives the results of the analysis at the neighborhood level. As stated earlier in the article, the basic idea of including neighborhood characteristics is that the direct environment of residents might influence their behavior in general and participation more specifically. We have included a number of neighborhood characteristics from which we might expect an influence on participation: share of ethnic minorities; share of unemployed; share of owner-occupiers; share of socially active people.

The findings show that the percentage of ethnic minorities in a neighborhood does not influence the participation rate (Table 3). However, we do find high participation rates among nonnatives in neighborhoods with 40 % or more nonnatives (analyses not shown). Examples are the Central

**TABLE 3**

#### Characteristics of the Neighborhoods Related to Participation in Neighborhood Organizations (t-test)

Characteristics	Participation	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
% ethnic minorities	No	3805	29.64	26.53
	Yes	366	28.71	26.99
% unemployed***	No	3805	12.70	7.80
	Yes	366	15.70	10.10
% homeowners**	No	3805	44.45	30.66
	Yes	366	47.81	30.31
Number of problems experienced***	No	3805	4.82	3.69
	Yes	366	5.73	3.72
% socially active residents***	No	3805	13.29	9.38
	Yes	366	18.34	9.04

Statistically significant difference: \* =  $p < 0.1$ ; \*\* =  $p < 0.5$ ; \*\*\* =  $p < 0.01$ .

Source. RESTATE survey 2004.

Estates (39% nonnatives) in the United Kingdom, Kista and Tensta in Sweden (61% nonnatives), and the Western Garden Cities (88% nonnatives) in the Netherlands. Of course, the chance of finding an active nonnative in a neighborhood with many nonnatives is higher than in neighborhoods with few nonnatives. This finding indicates that the idea that ethnic communities develop a consciousness of each other may only hold when there are enough coethnics to associate with.

We also expected that concentrations of deprived people might influence participation rates either positively, because of a communal need to improve the situation (Olsen, 1972), or negatively, because people felt that they had been abandoned (Ross, Mirowsky, & Pribesh, 2001). Our analyses show that residents do participate more in neighborhoods with higher unemployment rates. That is not to say that the percentage of unemployed people is a main reason underlying participation. A large number of unemployed people may be a proxy for a larger number of neighborhood problems, which might trigger people into participating in neighborhood activities. This proxy idea finds support in the same analysis; indeed, those living in areas with a large number of problems do participate significantly more than those living in areas with fewer problems.

Another indicator of deprivation is tenure. We expected that neighborhoods with high shares of houses in the social-rented sector would be characterized by lower participation rates. Surprisingly, we found no main effect from the share of owner-occupied dwellings, but we did find an interaction effect between the share of owner-occupied dwellings and tenure. This means that, in practice, a homeowner in an area with many other homeowners has a greater chance of being active in an association in the neighborhood than a homeowner in an area with a high share of rented dwellings. Possible explanations for this finding could be that associational life is more vigorous in areas with many homeowners, or that homeowners participate to maintain the quality of their neighborhood.

Indeed, people do not participate just to improve an unwanted situation; they also do so to maintain what is good. Participation was found to be higher in areas with relatively many homeowners than in areas with more (social) rented dwellings. Perhaps people who own the home they live in, and who may have lived in it for a comparatively long time, are more likely to want to invest in their neighborhood. Similarly, we found that participation in organizations that aim to improve the neighborhood is also higher in areas with more socially active people. This finding correlates with those reported in other research projects. Probably, social organizations like the sports club or cooking lessons form a podium for more formal organizations that aim to improve the neighborhood, like the tenant association and the neighborhood residents organization.

In general terms, variables at the neighborhood level seem to matter. It remains to be seen, however, whether they would also be significant in a multivariate analysis in which the effect of variables on the individual and the national level were also analyzed.

### **The Importance of National Variables**

As we have seen, individual and household characteristics are related to participation. Neighborhood characteristics were also shown to be of influence. In this section, we consider whether the national context has an effect on participation. The research question that is answered here is: To what extent are national opportunity structures helpful in explaining differences in individual participation in neighborhood organizations? To address this question, we performed a logistic regression analysis.

The logistic regression models estimated for participation are summarized in Table 4. The table shows the exponentiated coefficient (ExpB) for each variable together with its statistical significance. Only the individual and household characteristics were entered into the first model (Table 4). The analysis shows how participation in neighborhood organizations increases slightly with age, for households with children, and for people educated to a medium level, and is lower for



TABLE 4

**Logistic Regression Analysis: Odds-Ratios. Dependent Variable: Member of Neighborhood Organization**

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	Sig.	Exp(B)	Sig.	Exp(B)	Sig.	Exp(B)
Age	0.012	1.010**	0.005	1.012***	0.004	1.012***
Household with child	0.029	1.291**	0.035	1.298**	0.028	1.315**
Ethnic minority	0.788	0.964	0.628	0.886	0.089	0.623*
Low education (0–6 years)	0.000	1.886***	0.013	1.558**	0.159	1.298
Medium education (7–10 years)	0.170	1.205	0.149	1.228	0.579	1.084
No paid work	0.949	0.992	0.010	1.825**	0.004	1.949***
Moved into nbh $\geq$ 2001	0.008	0.645***	0.063	0.722*	0.055	0.713*
Tenant	0.002	0.674***	0.000	0.478***	0.001	0.485***
% unemployed			0.000	1.059***	0.049	1.025**
% unemployed * no paid work			0.010	0.968**	0.003	0.962***
% ethnic minorities			0.011	1.011**	0.601	0.997
% ethnic minorities * ethnic minority			0.804	0.999	0.327	1.006
% owner occupied housing			0.094	1.007*	0.034	1.010**
% owner occupied housing * home-owner			0.023	0.992**	0.026	0.992**
Index experience of problems			0.000	1.060***	0.000	1.067***
% active in social organizations			0.000	5.221***	0.000	4.980***
Democratic system					0.003	2.131***
Yes, active empowerment policy					0.012	1.922**
Constant	0.000	0.062	0.000	0.010	0.000	0.007
N	4171		4171		4171	
Df	8		16		18	
Significance	0.000		0.000		0.000	
Nagelkerke R <sup>2</sup>	0.039		0.160		0.173	

Method: enter.

Statistically significant difference: \* =  $p < 0.1$ ; \*\* =  $p < 0.5$ ; \*\*\* =  $p < 0.01$ .

Source: RESTATE survey 2004.

those who moved in after 2001, and tenants. On the whole, these findings are consistent with those of the bivariate analyses (Table 2). It should be noted that model 1 has a very low Nagelkerke's  $R^2$ , which indicates that the model has a relatively poor fit.

The second model (Table 4) includes not only individual and household characteristics, but also neighborhood characteristics. The Nagelkerke  $R^2$  rises from 0.039 to 0.160, indicating that neighborhood characteristics do indeed help account for the variance in participation. The model indicates how this particular set of ordinal or rational independent variables affects participation. In the bivariate analyses above we found that the neighborhood matters; but the question is whether that is still the case when neighborhood variables are analyzed jointly with individual variables.

The models show that, in neighborhoods with high shares of unemployed people, the respondents are a little more likely to participate than in neighborhoods with lower shares of unemployed. However, the analyses show that an unemployed respondent in a neighborhood with a high share of unemployed people has slightly lower chances of participating. This finding would imply that a concentration of disadvantaged residents did not lead to a community that invited people to participate. Instead, a disadvantaged person in a disadvantaged neighborhood has a slightly lower chance of participating than the same person would have when living in a neighborhood with fewer unemployed people.

The bivariate analyses shows that the share of ethnic minorities in a neighborhood is not related to participation. However, when we control for individual characteristics, we see that a

resident in a neighborhood with a high share of ethnic minorities has a slightly higher chance of participating than does a resident in a neighborhood with lower shares of ethnic minorities. This higher participation rate holds true for both ethnic minorities and native residents. This finding could mean that, contrary to the assumptions of many policymakers, concentrations of ethnic minorities do not necessarily have a negative effect on participation.

High shares of unemployed and ethnic minorities, therefore, influence participation positively. Both characteristics are related to deprivation; earlier in this article we referred to the idea that the residents of a problem neighborhood were more eager to improve the situation. This idea also finds support in these models: indeed, those living in areas with a large number of problems do participate significantly more than those living in areas with fewer problems.

In line with this thought, we find that participation is likely to be higher in neighborhoods with high shares of owner-occupied housing. Strikingly, the chance that a homeowner will participate is lower in these areas. The feeling of needing to participate is apparently weaker when there are other homeowners around. Perhaps fewer serious problems are experienced in neighborhoods with higher shares of homeownership.

The most important result of this analysis is that the level of the share of respondents who are active in a social organization has a large positive impact on the chance that a respondent will participate in a neighborhood management organization. This finding confirms the ideas of Tocqueville (1967 [1835]), Almond and Verba (1989 [1963]) and also Putnam (1993, 2000). Indeed, those who are active in a social organization also tend to be active in more formal forms of participation. The degree to which an individual has the opportunity to participate in social organizations in the neighborhood indeed has a positive impact on the degree of participation in neighborhood management activities as well. The odds-ratio is 5.221 for this variable, indicating that social engagement has a high explanatory value for the chances of participation.

Now that we have established that neighborhood characteristics are helpful in explaining part of the variance in the chance that a respondent will participate, we turn to the final research question: to what extent are national opportunity structures helpful in explaining differences in individual participation in neighborhood organizations? As we explained in the theoretical part of this article, we expected participation to be higher in countries with a democratic history, and with a (national) policy that actively empowers people.

In model 3 (Table 4), the national opportunity structure is taken into consideration in addition to the individual and household, and neighborhood characteristics. The Nagelkerke  $R^2$  rises to 0.173 (this figure was 0.160 in the second model, where national opportunity structures were not taken into account). This result indicates that the national opportunity structures do help to explain the variance in participation, but that the share of participation correctly predicted does not rise very much.

The findings support our hypothesis. Earlier in this article we expressed the view that the historical past may influence an individual's decision to participate. Uslander and Badescu (2003) formulated the idea that the culture left by more than half a century of authoritarian government has prevailed. As a result, people are reluctant to trust one another and to become civically engaged. The findings here support these notions, as those who live in countries with a communist history have lower chances of participating than do those living in countries with a democratic history (model 3, Table 4).

The findings indicate that the existence of an active empowerment policy is positively related to participation. So, participation is lower in countries without an active empowerment policy. In the theoretical section, we refer to empowerment as the set of mechanisms through which people gain greater control over their lives, thereby raising a critical awareness of their socio-political environment that may result in participation (Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995). Clearly, we can see a positive relationship between government actions that aim to generate the capacities,

consciousness, and feelings of control, and the chance to participate in an association that aims to improve the neighborhood.

As Mayer explains (2000), social movements “tend to go beyond particular community interests and . . . raise questions of democratic planning.” One may wonder if there is a relationship between these social movements and empowerment policies. We do not, of course, have data on the number of social movements in the research areas, but separate analyses (not shown) inform us that there is a weak relationship ( $p = 0.000$ ;  $V = 0.076$ ) between the existence of empowerment policies and the average level of involvement in social organizations. In neighborhoods with an empowerment policy, 15.2% of the respondents are active in a social organization, whereas this figure is only 9.2% in neighborhoods without an empowerment policy. Clearly, there is a positive impact of empowerment policies on the level of social involvement, which in turn positively influences participation in an association to improve the neighborhood. It should be noted that empowerment policies are mostly found in Northwest European countries, which also have a democratic history with respect to inclusive policies toward citizens.

Slovenia is the only country of our three cases in Central Europe with an empowerment policy. However, participation levels in Slovenia (5.6%) are only slightly higher than in Hungary (2.0%) and are lower than in Poland (8.5%). Separate analyses (not shown) indicate that in Slovenia individual and household characteristics do not influence the level of participation: the rates are equally low for everybody. Also, the indicators of social capital (social networks, trust) do not influence participation positively. A closer examination of the empowerment policies shows that they are relatively limited when compared with those in Northwest Europe. In Slovenia, most empowerment activities are undertaken by NGOs and depend on short-term funding. Moreover, although community groups take part structurally in neighborhood management committees, the policies are not part of the official government neighborhood development plans. So, although responsibility is delegated to the citizens, they are not supported in the development of their participatory skills, which may explain why participation levels are not significantly higher in Slovenia.

In Table 2, we note that participation is higher in South European countries than in Northwest European countries, where civic engagement and democratic traditions are stronger. A comparative study by Van Beckhoven, Van Boxmeer, and Garcia Ferrando (2005) may help us understand this unexpected result. The authors describe how, on an estate in Spain, the residents themselves developed instruments to enable them to participate. They used these instruments more effectively than did the residents on an estate in the Netherlands whose instruments were offered to them by policymakers. In this case a certain degree of freedom for the residents to empower themselves proved effective. Similarly, Díaz Orueta (2007) studied the resistance of the population in response to a total absence of involvement of the population in the Urban Development Plan in the case of Lavapiés (Madrid, Spain), and concluded: “the administrations involuntarily energized a process of neighborhood mobilization that generated greater community spirit and mutual interest amongst the population of Lavapiés. Social groups and neighbors that had not previously cooperated in any activities began to do so” (Díaz Orueta, 2007, p. 191). Both studies show that a lack of government action with respect to empowerment and participation has led to high levels of participation by many different groups of the population.

Summarizing, participation is highest for people who are elderly, who are part of a household with children, who do not have a paid job, and who have lived in the neighborhood for a long time in a home that they own. Participation is also greater in neighborhoods with high shares of unemployed (although in these neighborhoods an unemployed person participates slightly less than in other neighborhoods), high shares of owner-occupied houses (although a homeowner in an area with many other owner-occupied homes participates less than in other neighborhoods), many problems, and a large share of the population that is active in a social organization (the

football club, for example). Furthermore, the findings indicate that a resident who lives in a neighborhood in a country with a long democratic history and an active empowerment policy (mostly in Northwest Europe), has greater chances of participating to improve the neighborhood than would the same resident in a neighborhood in a country with a communist past, or no empowerment policies (mostly in Central Europe).

The findings do not fully support the hypothesis that a disadvantaged person moving from a disadvantaged neighborhood to a more prosperous one would subsequently participate more. Participation with the aim of improving the neighborhood seems to be fostered most by a lively social environment and having a problem to tackle. People with more time (unemployed) or a higher stake in the neighborhood (households with children, homeowners) tend to be more active in improving their neighborhood. However, when there are more shoulders to carry the burden of responsibility (because there are more people with time and/or a stake in the neighborhood), the efforts of these activists are less urgently needed and each tends to do a little less.

## CONCLUSIONS

The main aim of this article was to show how participation in neighborhood management could be explained by individual, neighborhood, and national characteristics. Other studies have already shown how individual and neighborhood characteristics matter, so our specific aim was to describe how the effects of these sets of characteristics change when the national level is taken into account. The article therefore contrasts with existing approaches to participation, which generally focus on individuals within the context of their neighborhood and neglect the multiple ways in which individual decision making is influenced by and embedded in the national context.

The results of the case-study material support the conceptual model outlined earlier in the paper. Individual variables are indeed important predictors of participation in neighborhood management. Indicators of the characteristics of the neighborhood (share of unemployed, share of owner occupied housing, the experience of problems, and in particular the share of residents who are active in a social organization) also emerged as important. The interaction effects between the characteristics of an individual in relation to the neighborhood suggest that a disadvantaged person (unemployed) in a disadvantaged neighborhood actually participates less than would the same person when living in a better neighborhood. This finding contradicts previous research (Olsen, 1972), which asserts that in neighborhoods with a concentration of disadvantaged residents cohesion may be higher, and consequently the residents may participate more to improve their situation. On the other hand, we did find a strong correlation between the level of social activity in a neighborhood and participation in organizations that aim to improve the neighborhood. This finding is in line with those of Sampson and Groves (1989) who state that neighbors in more advantaged places have higher levels of informal social ties that bind them together, which generates a positive effect on participation.

Perhaps the most important result from this study is the fact that national factors such as a democratic history and the existence of top-down empowerment policies seem to matter, even when variables on other levels are used in the same analysis. In countries like Hungary and Poland the chance that a person will participate is lower than in other European countries. Probably the fact that people have learned that no one can be trusted except your closest friends, and that civic engagement that threatens government authority is prohibited, still influences the decision to participate. In addition, the findings indicate that national and local policies are important. In the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, France, and Sweden active empowerment policies do generate higher levels of participation. The national policies are often implemented at the local level, and clearly would not be successful if they were obstructed at that level. We are led to wonder what would happen if the former communist countries were to pay more attention to the

issue of empowerment. Would that have the same effect as in the other parts of Europe? Or is the fact that people have learned not to trust anyone of larger influence on their individual decision whether to participate or not? How many years does it take for the effect of an old system to be eradicated? How long will it take for residents of Central Europe to adopt the norm of becoming involved? These questions are still open.

We carried out this research in 27 post-WWII estates in Europe. Do these areas have very specific characteristics so that the results might only be expected to hold for estates of this kind? On the one hand, the characteristics of the residents are not very different from those living in other older neighborhoods: a large number of elderly people who have lived there for a long time have a positive effect on participation. However, the enormous density and scale of the buildings on some estates in combination with large public areas in between them is generally supposed to enhance feelings of anonymity. This probably has a negative effect on participation that is not found in prewar neighborhoods or recently developed neighborhoods with a more personalized physical design. All in all, we may expect participation to be higher in neighborhoods with fewer problems and lower building densities. Older neighborhoods, where social organizations have had a longer time to prosper, can also be expected to have higher levels of participation. Since currently many policies focus on neighborhoods, especially in Northwest Europe, an understanding of the factors that influence participation in different kinds of neighborhood would be very helpful: for example, old as well as new, high density as well as low density, deprived as well as prosperous neighborhoods.

The findings should be interpreted with some care, since we measured participation as a one-dimensional concept. We have based our analysis on one question, asking neighborhood inhabitants whether they participated in organizations to improve their neighborhoods. In our opinion, this includes social movements and other forms of resistance (e.g., NIMBY groups), tenant movements and rights groups, collectives of homeowners, and so on. It is not totally clear whether the respondents raised everything that they could have done. Did they include spasmodic work cleaning the sidewalks or play areas? Future research could aim at more in-depth questioning about the exact associational form of participation, the preferences of each association, and the procedures through which they seek to achieve these preferences.

The cross-national comparison reported here has shown that part of the variation in participation may be explained by national factors. The national indicators used here were found helpful in predicting participation. However, what remains unclear is which policies aiming to empower people have a positive effect, and how this varies over space. Further research could focus on these different policy approaches that aim to empower people in a wide variety of social and spatial contexts. A study that included more countries would enable more detailed classifications to be made with respect to the character of empowerment policy and the democratic character of countries.

## ENDNOTES

- 1 We use the term *neighborhood* in a neutral way. The term is used as an area with (often official) boundaries set by, for example, a municipality. We do not use the term *neighborhood* as a social construct, since that would automatically imply that the area could draw on social cohesion or bonding. In this paper we use the terms *neighborhood* and *estate* interchangeably, although the term *estate* is often reserved in Europe for an area that has been developed according to a plan at one period in time. A neighborhood can develop over a longer time.
- 2 They note that that GDP and democratic history are highly correlated, and so are religion and political type (most social democratic countries are Protestant countries).
- 3 Forthcoming at the time of Schofer and Fourcade-Gourinchas' study.

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